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Composite Icons of Cyprus

DOROTA ZAPRZALSKA

The icon of Saint Paraskeve from the Church of the Prophet Elijah in Agridia, Cyprus, has been studied and even displayed at international exhibitions (Figs. 1 and 2),¹ though further comments can be made regarding its unusual form of an image within an image within an image. At the height of the saint's chest there is a smaller representation showing again Saint Paraskeve, but holding an image of the Man of Sorrows (*Akra Tapeinosis*).² Whereas the image of

Christ is a painted depiction of an icon,³ the smaller representation of Saint Paraskeve is a separate panel that was inserted into the larger one.⁴ So what we have is a painting of an icon within another icon, which is itself set within a third icon: without a doubt, a unique and challenging piece to interpret.

The phenomenon of artworks consisting of two paintings, one inserted into another—sometimes referred to by the German term *Einsatzbilder*—is well-known in research on Western European art.⁵

1 S. Sophocleous, ed., *Ikônes byzantines de Chypre 12^e–19^e siècle* (Nicosia, 1991), 20, 32, no. 17; and S. Sophocleous, ed., *À l'image de Dieu: Ikônes byzantines de Chypre du 12^e siècle à nos jours* (Strasbourg, 1994), 64, no. 14. The author of both catalogue notes is Sophocles Sophocleous, who dates the original painting layer of the icon to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century and rightly notes that some of its parts were repainted later. For more on the icon and later interventions, see S. Sophocleous, *Ikônes de Chypre: Diocèse de Limassol, 12^e–16^e siècle* (Nicosia, 2006), 169–70, no. 23. For photographs of the icon before the conservation work in 1992, see S. Sophocleous, “Le patrimoine des icônes dans le diocèse de Limassol, Chypre, 12^e–16^e siècle,” vol. 3, “Planches” (PhD diss., Université des sciences humaines de Strasbourg, 1990), pls. 35, 36.

2 This iconography of Saint Paraskeve, which is interpreted as a personification of Good Friday, is not common outside Cyprus and seems to be a local tradition. See A. Papageorgiou, *Icons of Cyprus* (Nicosia, 1992), 62; D. Mouriki, “The Cult of Cypriot Saints in Medieval Cyprus as Attested by Church Decorations and Icon Painting,” in *“The Sweet Land of Cyprus”: Papers Given at the Twenty-Fifth Jubilee Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, March 1991*, ed. A. A. M. Bryer and G. S. Georghallides (Nicosia, 1993), 237–77, at 253–54; and C. L. Connor, “Female Saints in Church Decoration of the Troodos Mountains in Cyprus,” in *Medieval Cyprus: Studies in*

Art, Architecture, and History in Memory of Doula Mouriki, ed. N. P. Ševčenko and C. Moss (Princeton, NJ, 1999), 211–40, at 219.

3 For more on this type of icons-within-icons and painted depictions of icons in icon, miniature, and monumental painting, see, for example, E. C. Schwartz, “Painted Pictures of Pictures: The Imitations of Icons in Fresco,” in *Fourth Annual Byzantine Studies Conference: Abstracts of Papers* (Washington, DC, 1978), 33–34; A. Grabar, “Les représentations d’icônes sur les murs des églises et les miniatures byzantines,” *ZbLkUmět* 15 (1979): 21–29; and G. Puma and M. A. Rossi, “Metapainting in Fourteenth-Century Byzantium and Italy: Performing Devotion through Time and Space,” *Studies in Iconography* 42 (2021): 95–116.

4 The inset is believed to be contemporary or slightly older than the larger one; see Sophocleous, *Ikônes de Chypre*, 170, no. 24.

5 See, for example, K. A. Wirth, “Einsatzbild,” in *Reallexikon zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 4, *Dinanderie–Elle*, ed. E. Gall and L. Heydenreich (Stuttgart, 1958), 1006–20; M. Warnke, “Italienische Bildtabernakel bis zum Frühbarock,” *MünchJb* 19 (1968): 61–102; V. I. Stoichita, *L’instauration du tableau: Métapeinture à l’aube des temps modernes*, 2nd rev. ed. (Geneva, 1999), 103–15; C. Hecht, “Das Bild am Altar: Altarbild—Einsatzbild und Rahmenbild—Vorsatzbild,” in *Format und Rahmen: Vom Mittelalter bis zur Neuzeit*, ed.



Fig. 1. Icon of Saint Paraskeve. Church of the Prophet Elijah, Agridia. Photograph by Ropertos Georgiou, APAC Labs / STARC; courtesy of The Cyprus Institute, reproduced by permission of the Holy Metropolis of Limassol.



Fig. 2. Icon of Saint Paraskeve (reverse). Church of the Prophet Elijah, Agridia. Photograph by Ropertos Georgiou, APAC Labs / STARC; courtesy of The Cyprus Institute, reproduced by permission of the Holy Metropolis of Limassol.

The similar phenomenon in icon painting is primarily mentioned together with other methods employed to keep icons in good condition.⁶ Only Panayotis L. Vocotopoulos has paid deserved attention to this group, being the first to propose a term, calling such

icons “composite icons” and σύνθετες εικόνες, respectively, in the English and Greek versions of his important article.⁷ Vocotopoulos considers his study to be

H. Körner and K. Möseneder (Berlin, 2008), 127–43; and I. Augart, *Rahmenbilder: Konfigurationen der Verehrung im frühneuzeitlichen Italien* (Berlin, 2018).

6 M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, “Τρόποι συντήρησης εικόνων στο Βυζάντιο,” in *Βυζαντινές εικόνες: Τέχνη, τεχνική και τεχνολογία / Byzantine Icons: Art, Technique and Technology: An International Symposium, Gennadius Library, the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 20–21 February 1998*, ed. M. Vassilaki (Heraklion, 2002), 151–61, at 154–55; and A. Tourta, “The Re-using of Old Icons in the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Period: The Case of the Icons of Thessaloniki,” in *Griechische Ikonen: Byzantinische und nachbyzantinische Zeit: Symposium in Marburg vom 26.–29.6.2000*, ed. E. Gerousis and G. Koch (Athens, 2010), 219–30, at 220–22.

7 P. L. Vocotopoulos, “Composite Icons,” in *Griechische Ikonen: Beiträge des Kolloquiums zum Gedenken an Manolis Chatzidakis in Recklinghausen, 1998 / Greek Icons: Proceedings of the Symposium in Memory of Manolis Chatzidakis, Recklinghausen, 1998*, ed. E. Haustein-Bartsch and N. Chatzidakis (Athens, 2000), 5–10; and P. L. Vocotopoulos, “Σύνθετες εικόνες: Μια πρώτη καταγραφή,” in *Σήμα Μενελάου Παρλαμά*, ed. L. Tzedake-Apostolake (Heraklion, 2002), 299–319. It must be noted that the method of insertion in icon painting has also been observed by Oleg Tarasov, who, while analyzing the role of frames in Russian icons, distinguishes a group of icons with older icons inserted, which he refers to using the Russian term *vrezok* (insertion); see O. Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion: Sacred Spaces in Imperial Russia*, trans. R. Milner-Gulland (London, 2002), 305–11; and O. Tarasov, *Framing Russian Art: From Early Icons to Malevich*, trans. R. Milner-Gulland and A. Wood (London, 2011), 180–81.



Fig. 3. Icon of the Virgin and Child. Church of Panagia Chrysopolitissa, Larnaka. Photograph by Ropertos Georgiou, APAC Labs / STARC; courtesy of The Cyprus Institute, reproduced by permission of the Holy Metropolis of Kition.



Fig. 4. Icon of the Virgin and Child (reverse). Church of Panagia Chrysopolitissa, Larnaka. Photograph by Ropertos Georgiou, APAC Labs / STARC; courtesy of The Cyprus Institute, reproduced by permission of the Holy Metropolis of Kition.

the first attempt to catalogue them and even proposes a definition—according to him, a composite icon is an icon “in which a small panel is surrounded by a large frame, whose decoration is figural and is related to that of the inset. . . . The inset panel of a composite icon is not necessarily a painting in tempera on wood. It may be a mosaic icon or a panel with decoration in relief, such as a steatite. On the other hand, the frame of a composite icon has to be a painting in egg tempera on wood.”⁸ Vocotopoulos has managed to assemble a significant number, dating from the early Palaiologan period to the nineteenth century, including two examples from Cyprus: the abovementioned icon of Saint Paraskeve (see above, Figs. 1 and 2) and an icon of the Virgin Mary at the Church of Panagia Chrysopolitissa

8 Vocotopoulos, “Composite Icons,” 5.

in Larnaka (Figs. 3 and 4) that consists of a central icon of the Virgin and Child separated by a wooden frame from the larger panel, which acts as an additional larger frame around the icon and depicts prophets and hymnographers holding scrolls.⁹

9 Vocotopoulos, “Composite Icons,” 7; and Vocotopoulos, “Σύνδετες εικόνες,” 302. The icon has been interpreted as a visual illustration of the hymn Ἄνωθεν οἱ προφήται σε προκατήγγειλαν (From Above the Prophets Have Heralded Thee); see Papageorgiou, *Icons of Cyprus*, 112. On this iconographic type, see N. V. Drandakes, “Το εικονογραφικὸ θέμα Ἄνωθεν οἱ προφήται σε τοιχογραφία της Μεγίστης Λαύρας του Αγίου Όρους,” *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Επ.* 20 (1998–1999): 195–200; and M. P. Kruk, “Is the So-called Ἄνωθεν οἱ προφήται, Described in Dionysius’s *Hermeneia*, the Source of the Iconography of the Mother of God Surrounded by Prophets?,” *Museikon: A Journal of Religious Art and Culture* 1 (2017): 53–68. Kostas Gerasimou has rightly noted a reclining figure in the lower part of the outer icon, despite the severe damage to this part; see K. Gerasimou, “Ἄνωθεν

It seems, though, that icons of this type are, or used to be, far more numerous on Cyprus (see below, Appendix). The group, at least at the current stage of research, consists of eight icons with insets meeting Vocotopoulos's definition of a composite icon (see below, Appendix, nos. 1–8), five icons that once used to have an inset or can be interpreted as a deliberate imitation of the composite form (see below, Appendix, nos. 9–13), and one icon that is now lost (see below, Appendix, no. 14). This paper is the first attempt to present them in a single study and to reveal their possible subsequent use by paying close attention to the various material forms of such icons. The main aim of this study is to present and analyze Cypriot examples of composite icons not only in order to expand the group of such icons assembled by Vocotopoulos, but also to show the unique features of some of them to date unstudied and with no analogies elsewhere, thus highlighting the internal diversity of the phenomenon of composite icons and contributing to a better understanding of this unusual way of reusing icons. This paper reconsiders the act of insertion and argues that the role of larger panels goes far beyond the protection of the inset. As the Cypriot examples illustrate, the primary motivation for the act of insertion was also the recognition and authentication of the special status of the embedded icon, and the embedding one is not merely a frame for the inset. The large icons facilitate the effective presentation, transportation, and veneration of the insets, and the relation between the embedded and embedding panels in the Cypriot examples is far more complex than the one between a frame and a framed object. This paper pays attention to their characteristic features, possible local traditions, and instances of imitation, suggesting that the form of composite icons was particularly popular on Cyprus from the sixteenth century onward.

οι Προφῆται,” in *Η κατά Κίτιον αγιογραφική τέχνη*, ed. K. Gerasimou, K. Papaioakeim, and C. Spanou (Larnaka, 2002), 174–75, no. 26. Since the branch rises from the figure, it can be recognized as Jesse, so the composition was perhaps inspired by the iconographic theme of the Tree of Jesse. For the appearance of hymnographers in the Tree of Jesse, see V. Milanović, “The Tree of Jesse in the Byzantine Mural Painting of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: A Contribution to the Research of the Theme,” *Zograf* 20 (1989): 48–60, at 58.

Embedded and Embedding Icons

A short remark on terminology is needed in order to underline the distinctiveness and some unique features of Cypriot composite icons. Rather than “framed” icons, we should view these as “embedded” icons and therefore recognize the larger panel as a separate icon, and not merely a frame. The difference is crucial for such examples as the abovementioned icon of Saint Paraskeve from Agridia, whose form clearly stands out from the group described by Vocotopoulos; it can be noted that, except for the Agridia icon, all the examples in his study have the form of a central representation and a larger panel acting as its frame, that is decorated with numerous figures or narrative scenes, and thus resembling the form of so-called vita icons. Vocotopoulos even calls the larger icons framing the insets simply “larger panels” or employs for them the term “frame,” but the latter does not seem fully suitable for describing the Agridia icon—for the larger panel is an independent, self-contained image depicting Saint Paraskeve. The Cypriot examples highlight this internal diversity of the phenomenon and the variety of its forms, since most Cypriot examples, as we shall see, do not follow the usual form of a central representation and a frame. The only exceptions are the abovementioned Larnaka icon and an icon of Saint John the Baptist at the Church of the Holy Cross in Pano Lefkara (Fig. 5). The larger sixteenth-century icon in the form of a frame with scenes from the life of Saint John the Baptist had been added to an icon, most likely an icon of that saint, that was later lost and is currently replaced by a subsequent panel painted in 1860.¹⁰ The larger panel was even adjusted to the size of the embedded image by being cut, this being well visible on the back of the icon (Fig. 6). Here we are dealing with the less common situation of the larger icon being actually older than the inset.¹¹

10 K. Gerasimou, “Βιογραφικός κύκλος Αγίου Ιωάννη Προδρόμου,” in Gerasimou, Papaioakeim, and Spanou, *Η κατά Κίτιον αγιογραφική τέχνη*, 170–73, no. 25.

11 See, for example, the sixteenth-century icon in the collection of the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens (no. BXM11536), in which the inset has been replaced by an icon of the Virgin of the Passion from the seventeenth century: M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Icons of the Byzantine Museum of Athens* (Athens, 1998), 164–67, no. 48. For an icon in the Ecclesiastical Museum of Siatista (Greece) consisting of a larger panel from the seventeenth century and a later inset



Fig. 5. Icon of Saint John the Baptist. Church of the Holy Cross, Pano Lefkara. Photograph by Ropertos Georgiou, APAC Labs / STARC; courtesy of The Cyprus Institute, reproduced by permission of the Holy Metropolis of Trimythous.

Still, most of the Cypriot examples differ from this clear frame arrangement, and the form that distinctly prevails is that of the Agridia icon, with the figure from the inset icon repeated in the larger panel that can hardly be labeled as a frame. Probably even a broader reflection on possible terms for both parts in each composite icon is needed to find adequate ones that will reflect the

icon from the eighteenth century, see P. C. Papademetriou, “Σύνθετη εικόνα της αγίας Παρασκευής με σκηνές του βίου της στο Εκκλησιαστικό Μουσείο της Σιάτιστας,” *Μακεδονικά* 38 (2009): 59–95.



Fig. 6. Icon of Saint John the Baptist (reverse). Church of the Holy Cross, Pano Lefkara. Photograph by Ropertos Georgiou, APAC Labs / STARC; courtesy of The Cyprus Institute, reproduced by permission of the Holy Metropolis of Trimythous.

diversity of their forms. This goes beyond the scope of this particular study, but I deliberately avoid using the word “frame” within this paper, and rather use the terms “embedding” icons for larger panels and “embedded” or “inset” icons for inserted icons,¹² in order to show that

12 Cf. the French terms used by Victor I. Stoichita to describe such, as he calls them, “assemblages”: *l’image emboîtée* and *l’image emboîtante* as well as *l’image encastrée* and *l’image encastrante*: Stoichita, *L’instauration du tableau*, 103–4. In the English translations, they have appeared under various, sometimes overlapping forms as “embedded image” and “embedding/hosting images” as well as “inset

Fig. 7.
Panagia Valeriotissa. Church of
Saint Nicholas, Palodeia.
Photograph by Ropertos Georgiou,
APAC Labs / STARC; courtesy of
The Cyprus Institute, reproduced
by permission of the Holy
Metropolis of Limassol.



the larger panels are not merely frames and that the two icons combined as one are separate entities imbued with complex relations. The abovementioned arrangement—with the embedding and the embedded icon sharing the same or similar iconography—is particularly frequent in Cyprus, with the most common being icons of the Virgin Mary, such as, for example, a sixteenth-century

icon known as Panagia Valeriotissa (Fig. 7) kept at the Church of Saint Nicholas in Palodeia.¹³ Here both

image” and “insetting image/hosting image”; see V. I. Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-painting*, trans. A.-M. Glasheen (New York, 1997), 67–69; and V. I. Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Metapainting*, trans. A.-M. Glasheen, rev. L. Pericolo (London, 2015), 103–4.

13 Sophocleous attributes the icon to an anonymous Cypriot painter active in the third part of the sixteenth century; see S. Sophocleous, “Anonymous Cypriot Painter Active Around 1564–1584,” in *Abstracts of the IV. International Cyprological Congress, Lefkosia 29 April–3 May 2008*, ed. C. G. Chotzakoglou (Nicosia, 2008), 181–82. The icon has been heavily repainted, and only a small part, including the faces, appears to be the original sixteenth-century painting layer. For more on the icon and the later interventions, see Sophocleous, *Icons de Chypre*, 207–8, nos. 128–29. See also A. Papageorgiou, “Μήτηρ Θεού η Βαλεριώτισσα—Mother of God Valeriotissa,” in *Θρησκευτικές εικόνες της Κύπρου: Κατάλογος εικόνων με χορηγό συντήρησης το Ίδρυμα Α. Γ. Λεβέντη / Religious Icons of Cyprus: Catalogue of*



Fig. 8. Panagia Titiotissa. Church of Panagia, Kalavassos. Photograph by Ropertos Georgiou, APAC Labs / STARC; courtesy of The Cyprus Institute, reproduced by permission of the Holy Metropolis of Trimythous.



Fig. 9. Panagia Titiotissa (reverse). Church of Panagia, Kalavassos. Photograph by Ropertos Georgiou, APAC Labs / STARC; courtesy of The Cyprus Institute, reproduced by permission of the Holy Metropolis of Trimythous.

icons show the Virgin Mary holding Christ with his arms around her neck. Another example of such iconographic repetition is the sixteenth-century icon of the Virgin Mary and Child, known as Panagia Titiotissa, at the Church of Panagia in Kalavassos (Figs. 8 and 9).¹⁴

Icons Restored by the A. G. Leventis Foundation, vol. 1, ed. C. Bakirtzis (Nicosia, 2019), 535, no. E29a:1.

14 The inscription H THTHOTHCA, which seems to be a later addition, can be connected to the nearby river Vasilikos, known in the past as Tetios. For the old names of this river, see J. C. Goodwin, *An Historical Toponymy of Cyprus* (Nicosia, 1978), 848; and G. Karouzes, “Βασιλικός ποταμός ή βασιλοπόταμος,” in *Μεγάλη Κυπριακή Εγκυκλοπαίδεια*, vol. 3, ed. A. Paulides (Nicosia, 1985), 185–86. For this detail

The embedded icon, depicting again the Virgin Mary with the Child, is still visible despite its bad state of preservation. The embedded and embedding icons do not necessarily follow identical iconography, as illustrated by an icon known as Panagia Amirou, which dates to the

and more on the icon, see G. Petrou, “Αμφιπρόσωπη εικόνα-λειψανοθήκη: Α. Παναγία, Β. Σταύρωση,” in Gerasimou, Papaioakeim, and Spanou, *Η κατά Κίτιον αγιογραφική τέχνη*, 160–63, no. 21. Cf. a study by Gerasimou in the same publication, where he attributes the icon to Loukas Tochnites: K. Gerasimou, “Η αγιογραφική τέχνη στη Μητρόπολη Κιτίου από τα μέσα του 15ου έως τα τέλη του 17ου αιώνα,” in Gerasimou, Papaioakeim, and Spanou, *Η κατά Κίτιον αγιογραφική τέχνη*, 57–94, at 70.



Fig. 10. Panagia Amiroou. Monastery of Panagia Amiroou near Apsiou. Photograph by Ropertos Georgiou, APAC Labs / STARC; courtesy of The Cyprus Institute, reproduced by permission of the Holy Metropolis of Limassol.



Fig. 11. Panagia Amiroou (reverse). Monastery of Panagia Amiroou near Apsiou. Photograph by Ropertos Georgiou, APAC Labs / STARC; courtesy of The Cyprus Institute, reproduced by permission of the Holy Metropolis of Limassol.

sixteenth century and is still venerated at the monastery of Panagia Amiroou near Apsiou (Figs. 10 and 11).¹⁵ Even

15 On the embedding icon, with additional bibliography, see Sophocleous, *Ikônes de Chypre*, 239–40, no. 219. See also T. Kalle, “Μήτηρ Θεού η Νέα Φανερωμένη—Mother of God the Nea (New) Phaneromeni,” in Bakirtzis, *Θρησκευτικές εικόνες της Κύπρου / Religious Icons of Cyprus*, 352, no. E7a:1. See also the exhibition catalogue C. Kakkoura, ed., *The Living Presence of the Theotokos in Cyprus through Her Icons* (Paralimni, 2020), 43–44, fig. 21. For its state of preservation before the extensive cleaning by Chrysanthos Taliadoros in 1986, see the cover of Z. Raptopoulos, *Ακολουθία και ιστορικά στοιχεία της Ιεράς Μονής Παναγίας Αμειρούς* (Limassol, 1983). The embedded icon is in bad condition due to extensive damage, which makes dating the icon particularly difficult. Sophocleous has tentatively dated it to the sixteenth century, believing that it is contemporary to or slightly earlier than the large icon; see Sophocleous, *Ikônes de Chypre*,

though the figures are depicted in different poses, both panels show the Virgin Mary with the Child on her left arm. In order to fully understand the relation between two panels in each example, further questions, especially regarding their function and use, must be asked, and

240, no. 220. The dating of the inset icon should be, in my opinion, moved to the fourteenth century. For more, and for photographs of the details of the icon, see D. Zaprzalska, “Icons as ‘Movable’ Objects: The Case of the Panagia Amiroou Icon,” *Convivium* 11.2 (forthcoming). On the present cult of this icon, see D. Zaprzalska, “Religious Heritage Complex and Authenticity: Past and Present Assemblages of One Cypriot Icon,” in “Sacred Heritage: Religions and Material Culture,” *Religions* 14.9 (2023): 1107.

therefore each of these icons deserves close analysis with attention being paid to details suggesting their potential use and reuse.

Question of Possible Use

The form of composite icons, according to my knowledge, is not mentioned in any written sources from the time of their creation that could shed light on the reason behind inserting icons into others and their possible use. In some rare examples, there are inscriptions revealing at least some parts of the icons' history. The back side of the Panagia Titiotissa icon depicts the Crucifixion (see above, Fig. 9) and contains an inscription revealing that the small icon was found in 1561 by a monk named Sophronios, son of Antrias (Andreas) of Managroulli, which is most likely a misspelling of the nearby village Monagroulli (Μοναγρούλλι),¹⁶ so the inscription provides not only the dating, but also an indication that the inserted icon had been in Sophronios's private possession, and we can perhaps identify the portrayal of the kneeling monk next to the inscription as being him.¹⁷ It can be hypothesized that Sophronios was responsible for the commissioning of the larger panel in order to host his precious icon that

was additionally hidden behind a one-winged door. Maybe it remained in private possession after the act of insertion, but it is more likely that it was used in a public or liturgical sphere, rather than a private one, due to the considerable size of the embedding icon and the presence of a pole.

A portrait of a kneeling monk in the lower left-hand corner appears also in the Panagia Amirou icon. The figure is accompanied by a dedicatory inscription: ΔΕΗCIC ΤΟΥ ΔΟΥΛΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ ΓΕΡΑΣΙΜΟΥ ΜΟΝΑΧΟΥ Κ(ΑΙ) ΤΟΥ ΕΥ[CEBECTΑΤΟΥ?] [] [ΥΠΕΡΑΓ]ΙΑC Θ(ΕΟΤΟ)Κ(Ο)Υ (Supplication of the Servant of God the monk Gerasimos and [of the very pious?] . . . of the Most Holy Theotokos). The Gerasimos from the inscription has been interpreted as the hegumen of the monastery Gerasimos mentioned in numerous inscriptions in the church, who died in 1727,¹⁸ but it is equally possible that the inscription and the figure are contemporary with the sixteenth-century painting or only slightly later and that the Gerasimos mentioned in the inscription is simply not the eighteenth-century hegumen Gerasimos; therefore, this question remains open.¹⁹ Even if he were responsible for the act of insertion, his primary motivation remains unknown. Indeed, due to the lack of written sources, the primary use of composite icons, and therefore the reason behind the act of insertion, remains an unsolved question, but paying close attention to their various forms and details might suggest some possible answers.

The details of the icons cast some light on their anticipated functions and later history. Further observations can be made, for example, regarding the two Cypriot icons included in Vocotopoulos's study. Kostas Gerasimou has noticed that a kneeling, praying figure in the lower left-hand corner and the margins of the Larnaka icon are slightly cut.²⁰ This detail may tell us

16 ΔΕΗCIC ΤΟΥ ΔΟΥΛΟΥ / ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ CΟΦΡΟ / ΝΙΟΥ ΜΟΝΑΧΟΥ / ΪΟC ΑΝΤΡΙΑ / ΑΠΟ ΤΟ ΜΑΝΑ / ΓΡΟΥΛΛΗ / ΑΠΟΥ ΗΒΡΕ ΤΗΝ / ΑΥΤΗΝ ΗΚΟΝΑ / ΕΧΡΟΝΗΑC / ΑΦΞΑ (= 1561) Χ(ΡΙCΤΟ)Υ / ΕΝ ΜΗΝΗ ΔΙ / ΚΕΒΡΙΟ ΤΗ / ΙΕ (= 15) ΕΒΡΕΘΙ (Supplication of the Servant of God monk Sophronios, son of Andreas from Managroulli [= Monagroulli], where he found this icon [= the inset icon]. It was found in the year of Christ 1561, December 15). It is possible that the icon was found in Monagroulli, but it must be noted that ΑΠΟΥ could stand for "who" or "where." For its meaning in vernacular Greek, suggesting the latter, see E. Kriaras, *Λεξικό της Μεσαιωνικής Ελληνικής Δημόδους Γραμματείας 1100–1669*, vol. 3 (Thessaloniki, 1973), 137. The date mentioned in the inscription (1561) appears to refer to the discovery of the inset icon. It constitutes a *terminus post quem* for the creation of the embedding panel; see Petrou, "Αμφιπρόσωπη εικόνα-λειψανοθήκη," 163.

17 Such depictions appear on composite icons from other territories; see, for example, a composite icon at the Vlatadon Monastery in Thessaloniki: A. Tourta, "Two-Sided Icon with Inset Small Bi-zonal Icon," in *Το ημέτερον κάλλος: Βυζαντινές εικόνες από τη Θεσσαλονίκη / Our Sacred Beauty: Byzantine Icons from Thessaloniki*, ed. F. Karagianni (Thessaloniki, 2018), 206–11, no. 14. The figure in the lower left corner could be that of a previous owner of the smaller icon who ordered its insertion into the larger panel, as suggested by Annemarie Weyl Carr; see A. W. Carr, "Images: Expressions of Faith and Power," in *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)*, ed. H. C. Evans (New York, 2004), 143–52, at 146.

18 As suggested by Sophocleous, who claims, based on the date of the death of this particular Gerasimos, that his depiction with the inscription should be dated to the beginning of the eighteenth century; see Sophocleous, *Icons de Chypre*, 147. For the inscriptions in the church mentioning Gerasimos, see I. Sykoutres, "Μοναστήρια ἐν Κύπρῳ. Ἀμῖρου," *Κυπριακά Χρονικά* 2 (1924): 79–85, at 83.

19 For more on this, as well as the infrared images revealing the underdrawing suggesting the latter, see Zaprzalska, "Icons as 'Movable' Objects" (forthcoming).

20 Gerasimou, "Ἀνωθεν οἱ Προφῆται," 174. Gerasimou has also analyzed the larger panel and pointed out that stylistic and iconographic

more about the act of insertion and the previous history of the icon—it seems that the icon was adjusted to an already existing frame, and it is possible that the current inset replaced another icon, originally placed in the center, one that had been lost or destroyed. In the case of the icon of Saint Paraskeve from Agridia, it can be noted that the embedded panel is independent, so it is possible to remove it from the cavity, which is not common among composite icons.²¹ An additional feature of this niche is the fact that it is painted in red,²² and it cannot be excluded that it was meant to be seen and that the small embedded icon was indeed removed on certain occasions. Another intriguing detail—the metal strips on both sides of the cavity—suggests that the smaller icon of Saint Paraskeve was somehow embellished; most likely, a metal or wooden movable wing was added at some point to conceal the embedded icon.²³ This constitutes an unusual feature. At the same time, as I will stress below in more detail, it has analogies among Cypriot examples. Such a movable wing is present in the abovementioned Panagia Amirou icon (see above, Fig. 10), but it seems that the current wing was created when this particular part, previously not movable, cracked, and this fragment of the icon was transformed into a movable object. It can be hypothesized, though, that the icon was originally furnished with a wing, or rather two wings, and the original opening was limited to the small square at the height of the faces of the Virgin Mary and Christ, as suggested by the remaining opening in the left wing. If so, then initially the embedded icon was not meant to be removed. It is now, however, completely separate and can be taken out

of the cavity. Close examination reveals two small metal elements on the right edge, arranged symmetrically, suggesting that the icon used to be attached to another panel. It appears that, prior to the act of insertion into the larger panel, it had been the wing of a diptych, or maybe even a triptych.²⁴ The metal elements can act as a clear confirmation that this is indeed a reused icon, even though the details of its previous history are unknown.

Finally, some general conclusions regarding Cypriot composite icons can also be made—these are rather large paintings (see below, Appendix, Dimensions),²⁵ suitable for their use as despotic icons in templon screens or being installed in special thrones, so they were most likely intended for prominent display. The icon in Larnaka has visible traces indicating that a shaft was added to it (see above, Fig. 4) and the icons in Agridia and Amirou had their wooden poles cut (see above, Fig. 2 and Fig. 11), but some parts of them are still visible, suggesting that they might have been employed in processions.²⁶ The Panagia Titiotissa icon from Kalavassos has retained its pole to this day, similarly to the Panagia Valeriotissa icon from Palodeia that is in fact still used in procession every year, on the Tuesday after Easter, when it is carried to its nearby place of origin.²⁷ We do not know whether they were used in processions in the past, but the larger panel indeed allows for easier and

similarities to some Cypriot icons confirm that the icon could have been painted on Cyprus at the beginning of the sixteenth century and not in Italy, as suggested by Papageorgiou. See Gerasimou, “Ἀνωθεν οἱ Προφῆται,” 174; cf. Papageorgiou, *Icons of Cyprus*, 112.

21 A thirteenth-century icon kept at the Church of Archangels in Labskaldi, Georgia, is an example outside of Cyprus. The embedded icon of John the Baptist is completely independent and can be taken out from the cavity; see N. Chichinadze, *Medieval Georgian Icon Painting: 11th–14th Century Painted Icons from Svaneti* (Tbilisi, 2011), 104, 115–16, no. 22; and N. Burčulaže, *K'art'uli xatebi* (Tbilisi, 2016), 316–19.

22 According to Sophocleous, red used to be the original background color for the inset icon as well; see Sophocleous, *Icons de Chypre*, 28.

23 For more on this detail of the icon, see D. Zaprzalska, “Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Composite Icons Reconsidered: Their Past and Present-Day Role and Use,” *Mediaevalia* 45 (forthcoming).

24 The left side of the embedded icon is in a worse state of preservation, due to severe damage caused by woodworm, so it is not possible to establish with any degree of certainty whether any wing was attached to this part as well. For photographs, see Zaprzalska, “Icons as ‘Movable’ Objects” (forthcoming).

25 On size as an important feature of icons, yet often overlooked in research, see L. James, “Things: Art and Experience in Byzantium,” in *Experiencing Byzantium: Papers from the 44th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Newcastle and Durham, April 2011*, ed. C. Nesbitt and M. Jackson (Farnham, 2013), 17–34, at 23.

26 It is also possible that such poles were used for affixing the icons to thrones; see A. W. Carr, “Reflections on the Life of an Icon: The Eleousa of Kykkos,” *Επετηρίδα Κέντρου Μελετών Ιεράς Μονής Κύκκου* 6 (2004): 103–62, at 116.

27 The icon comes from a chapel of the Virgin Mary destroyed in the 1960s when the Polemidia Dam was built. The local community built a new one nearby, and the tradition still continues. For an earlier description of the procession, as well as the miracles and legends surrounding the icon of Panagia Valeriotissa, see R. Gunnis, *Historic Cyprus: A Guide to Its Towns and Villages, Monasteries and Castles* (London, 1936), 364. On the current cult of the icon, see Zaprzalska, “Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Composite Icons Reconsidered” (forthcoming).

more ostentatious transportation, so it is possible that they were planned not as static but, rather, as movable objects. The embedding icons could have been seen as a means of presentation and transportation, drawing attention to the relatively small embedded icon. Small dimensions can be seen as an attribute of icons used in domestic contexts, as supports for private prayer.²⁸ Due to the small size of inset icons (see below, Appendix, Dimensions), it may be hypothesized that they were associated with domestic or private piety prior to the act of insertion, and that their incorporation into larger icons signposts their transfer from the individual sphere to the public dimension of collective devotion. Perhaps a small icon would not be acknowledged as worthy of public piety without incorporation into a wider surface and thus made to look like an icon intended for display in a church context. The role of embedding icons, so it appears, is not only protection, but mostly the highlighting of the object enclosed within and its authentication. Similar observations have been made by Michele Bacci, who pays attention to the phenomenon of transforming Cretan icons into relic-like objects in Ethiopia, where their visual features were claimed to be evocative of their ancient provenance, and such icons were believed to be old, miracle-working, or even painted by Saint Luke. He notes the similarity of the phenomenon to the fate of icons in early modern Italy, where they were often incorporated within larger (sculpted or painted) surfaces in order “to focus the viewers’ attention toward their archaic, anachronistic appearance, which worked as a metaphoric indicator of their sanctity.”²⁹ As he rightly observes, the preference for exotic or retrospective forms can be encountered in different cultures, where such objects were often framed, enshrined, or concealed while their visual difference was deliberately used to signpost their exceptional status.³⁰ The contrast of techniques, styles, or materials in the Cypriot examples is perhaps less self-evident, but the visual amplification of the inset is still present, and so

is the issue of different conditions of accessibility and visibility. It seems that concealment indeed played a prominent role in the case of Cypriot composite icons, since some of them share the uncommon feature of having movable wings allowing for the dispensation of the embedded icon. Unfortunately, it is not known when the movable wings were closed and when open, but since the form allows for such a concealment and revelation of the inset icons, it can be supposed that they were meant to be seen on some occasions and hidden on others. These considerations on their possible use and means of perception can be enhanced by further observations on the movable wings covering the embedded icons and the gesture of hiding and revealing, and thus the relation between the embedded and the embedding icon.

Concealment and Control

The composite icons from Cyprus are sometimes provided with wings in the form of small doors that allowed the embedded icon to be hidden or revealed. This feature, possibly a local tradition, deserves particular attention because, by using this material logic of interiority and unveiling, such one- or two-winged doors stress the central panels, by enhancing their sanctity and visual significance, and enable their dispensation.

As noted above, the remaining metal elements on both sides of the cavity of the icon of Saint Paraskeve from Agridia (see above, Fig. 1) suggest that it used to be covered, and the icon of Panagia Amirou (see above, Fig. 10) most likely used to have a wing, or perhaps two, covering the opening at the height of the faces of the Virgin Mary and Child. Moreover, there are Cypriot examples that have retained their wings covering the embedded icon, such as the abovementioned Panagia Titiotissa from Kalavassos (see above, Fig. 8) with a one-winged door whose obverse is integral with the *maphorion* of the Virgin while the reverse depicts Saint Luke. A form of two wings was also added to an icon in the Church of Panagia Chryseleousa in Praitori (Fig. 12) depicting the Virgin Mary supporting the Child with her right arm.³¹ The small inserted icon, depicting again the Virgin Mary with Christ in the same position and

28 For more on icons in private, rather than public, contexts, see M. Bacci, “Devotional Panels as Sites of Intercultural Exchange,” in *Domestic Devotions in Early Modern Italy*, ed. M. Corry, M. Faini, and A. Meneghin (Leiden, 2019), 272–92.

29 M. Bacci, “Mediterranean Entanglements as Reflected in 15th Century Ethiopian Images of the Virgin Mary,” *Rassegna di studi etiopici*, 3rd ser., 6 (2022): 13–96, at 29.

30 Bacci, “Mediterranean Entanglements,” 26.

31 On the icon, see T. Kalle, “Μήτηρ Θεού η Ελεούσα—Mother of God Eleousa,” in Bakirtzis, *Θρησκευτικές εικόνες της Κύπρου / Religious Icons of Cyprus*, 267, no. B9a:1.

Fig. 12.
Icon of the Virgin and
Child. Church of Panagia
Chryseleousa, Praitori.
Photograph by Ropertos
Georgiou, APAC Labs /
STARC; courtesy of The
Cyprus Institute,
reproduced by
permission of the Holy
Metropolis of Paphos.



accompanied by the inscription [MHTHP] Θ(ΕΟ)Υ
H [E]Λ[E]OYCA, is hidden behind two wings allow-
ing closing and opening, which were originally deco-
rated with two seraphim, now only partially preserved.

This unusual element, enabling hiding and reveal-
ing, was added to Cypriot composite icons not only
in the form of movable wooden panels, but also in the
form of metal revetments, such as, for example, the
one added to a sixteenth-century icon of the Virgin
and Child known as Panagia Agria (Fig. 13). This
comes from a now ruined monastery, located between
Kaminaria and Mylikouri, and was transferred to the
Church of Saint George in Mylikouri after its original

location was destroyed by fire in 1878. The icon can
be dated to 1523, a date mentioned in the dedica-
tory inscription.³² As rightly noted by Christodoulos
Hadjichristodoulou, the inset icon is much later than
the embedding panel. He suggests that it replaced an
earlier inset in 1908, when some parts of the larger panel

32 For the inscription on the icon, and more on its previous loca-
tion, see S. Kykkotes and G. Panages, “Η Ιερὰ Μονή Παναγίας Αγρίας,”
Επετηρίδα Κέντρου Μελετών Ιερών Μονών Κύπρου 3 (1996): 149–61, at
150. The inscription ends with unintelligible symbols. For more on
this detail and the history of the icon, see C. Hadjichristodoulou,
“Our Lady Hodegetria, 1523,” in *Holy Bishopric of Morphou: 2000 Years
of Art and Holiness* (Nicosia, 2002), 296–97, no. 26.



Fig. 13.
Panagia Agria. Church of
Saint George, Mylikouri.
Photograph by Ropertos
Georgiou, APAC Labs /
STARC; courtesy of The
Cyprus Institute,
reproduced by
permission of the Holy
Metropolis of Kykkos.

were repainted.³³ The elaborated revetment covering the icon, consisting of a few pieces, has a one-winged door, installed to fully hide the inset.³⁴ The icon is still

venerated and covered additionally with a red cloth, something recalled already by Gunnis in 1936, who in his description of the church mentioned “a curious icon of the B.V.M., dated 1523, partially covered with gilt repoussé, and so holy that the face of the Madonna

33 Hadjichristodoulou, “Our Lady Hodegetria, 1523,” 296.

34 A particularly interesting detail of the revetment are medallions decorating the neck of the Virgin: two of them depict lions, one an eagle, and one Christ. It has been noted that the last one is in fact a reused Venetian coin from the time of Leonardo Loredan, who reigned as the doge of Venice from 1501 until 1521, and it is a terminus post quem for the dating of the revetment itself; see S. K. Perdakis, “Parts of the Revetment of an Icon of Our Lady Agria,” in *Holy Bishopric of Morphou*, 428–29, no. 91. See also S. K. Perdakis, “Το κάλυμμα της Παναγίας Αγρίας—Δείγμα εκκλησιαστικής αργυροχοΐας

της βενετοκρατούμενης Κύπρου,” in *Κύπρος-Βενετία: Κοινές ιστορικές τύχες / Cipro-Venezia: Comuni sorti storiche*, ed. C. A. Maltezou (Venice, 2002), 337–45; and G. E. Markou, “Negotiating Identity and Status: The Silverware of the Cypriot Nobles in Renaissance Venice,” in *The Art and Archaeology of Lusignan and Venetian Cyprus (1192–1571): Recent Research and New Discoveries*, ed. M. Olympios and M. Parani (Turnhout, 2019), 301–19, at 307–8.

can never be seen, but must always be covered with an embroidered cloth.”³⁵

The role of accoutrements that affected the visibility of icons has been recognized.³⁶ There are composite icons with revetments covering the inset images,³⁷ but the form of movable wings, according to my knowledge, is not attested in composite icons within territories other than Cyprus and can be encountered in Cypriot examples exclusively. The only exception are some Georgian examples of composite icons that, on the other hand, have the form of triptychs, so movable wings hide the entire central panel.³⁸ Wings installed at the height of

the embedded icon, as this material suggests, appear to be a distinctive Cypriot feature. The form of doors not only allows one to grade the accessibility to the smaller image, but also indicates that someone had control over optic access to the hidden inset and decided who was allowed to see or maybe even touch it (and when they could do so)—we can only assume that the devotees perhaps wanted to access the special qualities not only through sight, but also through touch, so we cannot exclude the possibility that the control was intended over haptic access as well.³⁹ When closed, wings entirely concealed the inserted smaller icon from view. This brings to mind the icon of Panagia Kykkotissa—probably the best-known Cypriot icon, whose presentation relies on limited visibility and restricted accessibility that includes arrangements for the protection of, and controlled access to, it. The Kykkotissa icon is considered to be miracle working and is traditionally hidden from view by an embroidered curtain and an eighteenth-century silver icon cover.⁴⁰ The former revetment, which is preserved at the Museum of the Holy Monastery of Kykkos (Fig. 14), is the product of a Cypriot workshop that was made in Nicosia by the goldsmith Toumazos in 1576. It seems that he in fact reused an older piece of artwork; the silver gilt frieze with little busts of apostles and saints that is affixed at the bottom appears to be an earlier work dated to the end of the fifteenth century.⁴¹

35 Gunnis, *Historic Cyprus*, 345. For more on the figure of Gunnis, an inspector of antiquities for the Cyprus Museum, see R. Storrs, *Orientalisms* (London, 1939), 512.

36 On the gesture of hiding icons by adding veils, see, for example, M. Bacci, *Il pennello dell'Evangelista: Storia delle immagini sacre attribuite a san Luca* (Pisa, 1998), 237; A. W. Carr, “Threads of Authority: The Virgin Mary’s Veil in the Middle Ages,” in *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. S. Gordon (New York, 2001), 59–93, esp. 70; and M. Parani, “Experiencing Miraculous Icons in Byzantium: The Examples of the Icon of the ‘Usual Miracle’ and the Hodegetria in Constantinople,” in *Visibilité et présence de l’image dans l’espace ecclésial: Byzance et Moyen Âge occidental*, ed. S. Brodbeck and A.-O. Poilpré (Paris, 2019), 171–94, esp. 192–94. For more on various decorative hangings given in thanks or supplication to icons, see V. Nunn, “The Encheirion as Adjunct to the Icon in the Middle Byzantine Period,” *BMGS* 10.1 (1986): 73–102.

37 One such example, although a late one, is the composite icon at the Glozhene Monastery of Saint George (Bulgaria); see G. Chavrukov, *Bŭlgarski manastiri: Pametniŭsi na istoriŭata kulturata i izkustvoto* (Sofia, 1978), 74; and I. Gergova, “Russian Icons in Bulgaria,” in *Routes of Russian Icons in the Balkans (16th–Early 20th Centuries)*, ed. Y. Boycheva (Seyssel, 2016), 151–60, at 154–55; and D. Zaprzalska, “Composite Icons in the Collections of Bulgarian Museums and Monasteries,” in *Metamorphoses*, ed. I. Dosseva, M. Kuyumdzhieva, and R. Rousseva, Art Readings Series (Sofia, 2024), 455–74, at 465. For the photograph of the revetment from 1780 that was added to the Larnaka icon and removed in 1988, see Hieromonk S. G. Michaelides, *O Ierós Naós Pαναγίας Χρυσοπολιτίσσης στη Λάρνακα* (Larnaka, 2005), 163.

38 See, for example, two icons from Ubisi (nos. 612 and 613) at the Georgian National Museum (Shalva Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts) in Tbilisi: G. Alibégašvili, “Deux triptyques d’Oubissi: Icônes géorgiennes du style des Paléologues,” in *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art-Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, ed. C. Moss and K. Kiefer (Princeton, NJ, 1995), 479–86, at 479–83; and M. Studer-Karlen “Old Testament Prefigurations of the Mother of God in Medieval Georgian Iconography,” in *Cultural Interactions in Medieval Georgia*, ed. M. Bacci, T. Kaffenberger, and M. Studer-Karlen (Wiesbaden, 2018), 89–114, at 109–13, pl. XVIII. See also other composite icons of a similar triptych form: N. Chichinadze, “Some Compositional Characteristics of Georgian Triptychs of the

Thirteenth through Fifteenth Centuries,” *Gesta* 35.1 (1996): 66–76, at 68–69, 71–74, figs. 3–4, 10–11.

39 On the role of touching and kissing icons, see, for example, L. James, “Senses and Sensibility in Byzantium,” *Art History* 27.4 (2004): 523–37, at 526–27; L. James, “‘Seeing’s Believing, but Feeling’s the Truth’: Touch and the Meaning of Byzantine Art,” in *Images of the Byzantine World: Visions, Messages and Meanings; Studies Presented to Leslie Brubaker*, ed. A. Lymberopoulou (Farnham, 2011), 1–14, at 9–10; B. Caseau, “Experiencing the Sacred,” in Nesbitt and Jackson, *Experiencing Byzantium*, 59–77, at 76; I. Drpić, *Epigram, Art, and Devotion in Later Byzantium* (Cambridge, 2016), 341–43; and B. Caseau, “Byzantine Christianity and Tactile Piety (Fourth–Fifteenth Centuries),” in *Knowing Bodies, Passionate Souls: Sense Perceptions in Byzantium*, ed. S. A. Harvey and M. Mullett (Washington, DC, 2017), 209–22, at 217, 221.

40 On Kykkotissa, see M. Tatić-Djurić, “L’icône de la Vierge Kikkotissa,” *Επετηρίδα Κέντρου Μελετών Ιεράς Μονής Κύκκου* 1 (1990): 209–20; O. Gratziou, “Μεταμορφώσεις μιας θαυματουργής εικόνας: Σημειώσεις στις όψεις παραλλαγές της Παναγίας του Κύκκου,” *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Έτ.* 17 (1993–1994): 317–29; and Carr, “Reflections on the Life of an Icon,” 103–24.

41 A. Stylianou and J. A. Stylianou, *The Painted Churches of Cyprus: Treasures of Byzantine Art*, rev. ed. (Nicosia, 1997), 41–42, fig. 10.



Fig. 14.
Revetment of the
Kykkotissa icon.
Museum of the Holy
Monastery of Kykkos.
Photograph courtesy of
the Museum of the Holy
Monastery of Kykkos.

Even though it is not entirely certain whether this is indeed the first revetment to cover this specific icon,⁴² it deserves particular attention not only due to its primary function of covering the Kykkotissa icon, but also because of the small, rectangular, movable one-winged door at the height of the left hand of Christ. This particularly interesting detail enables the opening and thus more direct access to the holy object—at least to a small

part of it. We can assume that the door was indeed opened on some occasions, as attested by a description by Vasil Barsky from 1736, who mentions that the icon “is all covered with a silver [mount] except for the faces and a small window over the hands left open for veneration by kissing. The face is always covered by a precious veil, and the common people say that no one has ever seen the face.”⁴³

The gesture of opening and closing is provided by much later revetments added to icons particularly venerated, such as the icon at the Church of Panagia Kivotos in the village of Agios Theodoros that bears the inscription H KHKHOTHCA and predates

See also S. K. Perdakis, *Guide to the Museum of the Holy Monastery of Kykkos* (Nicosia, 1998), 25, fig. 32; N. Gkioles, *Η χριστιανική τέχνη στην Κύπρο* (Nicosia, 2003), 276–77, fig. 228; and S. K. Perdakis, “Μεταλλοτεχνία,” in *Ιερά Μονή Κύκκου: Εικόν ανεσπέρου φωτός*, ed. A. Tselikas and S. K. Perdakis (Athens, 2010), 409–37, at 434.

42 As suggested by Jannic Durand, it is possible that the revetment replaced an earlier one; see J. Durand, “Chypre et les arts somptuaires byzantins (X^e–XII^e siècle),” in *Chypre entre Byzance et l’Occident, IV^e–XVI^e siècle*, ed. J. Durand and D. Giovannoni (Paris, 2012), 150–55, at 151–52.

43 V. Bars’kyj, *A Pilgrim’s Account of Cyprus: Bars’kyj’s Travels in Cyprus*, trans. A. D. Grishin, *Sources for the History of Cyprus* 3 (Altamont, NY, 1996), 47.

Fig. 15.
Icon revetment (from the
Church of Panagia
Chryseleousa in Praitori).
No. 115, Byzantine
Museum of the Holy
Metropolis of Paphos,
Paphos. Photograph
courtesy of the Holy
Metropolis of Paphos.



Toumazos's cover.⁴⁴ In 1848, the central part of the icon was covered with a metal cover with a depiction of the Virgin Mary not following the iconography of the larger panel associated with the Kykkotissa type, but instead showing the Virgin Mary with Christ on

her left arm accompanied by an inscription bearing the title *Kivotos* (that is, Ark)—M(HT)HP Θ(EO)Y H KIBΩΤΟΣ.⁴⁵ The addition of doors can be seen as an example of the long continuation of this local tradition. An earlier and particularly interesting example is a revetment that is now kept at the Byzantine Museum of the Holy Metropolis of Paphos (Fig. 15) but used to adorn an icon in the Church of Panagia Chryseleousa

44 The icon has been analyzed by Sophocleous, who dates it to the late thirteenth century; see S. Sophocleous, "Η εικόνα της Κυκκώτισσας στον Άγιο Θεόδωρο του Αγρού," *Επετηρίδα Κέντρου Μελετών Ιεράς Μονής Κύκκου* 2 (1993): 329–37; and Sophocleous, *Icons of Chypre*, 166–67, no. 13. Carr has suggested that the icon is later; see A. W. Carr, "The 'Virgin Veiled by God': The Presentation of an Icon on Cyprus," in *Reading Medieval Images: The Art Historian and the Object*, ed. E. Sears and T. K. Thomas (Ann Arbor, MI, 2002), 215–27, at 226, n. 10; and Carr, "Reflections on the Life of an Icon," 112.

45 On the revetment, see Sophocleous, "Η εικόνα της Κυκκώτισσας," 331, 341, fig. 4. For the photographs before the conservation, with visible traces of the revetment, see *ibid.*, 338, fig. 1; and S. Sophocleous, *Icons of Cyprus: 7th–20th Century* (Nicosia, 1994), 156, fig. 28.

in Praitiori.⁴⁶ Its exact dating is not certain;⁴⁷ it also cannot be excluded that the revetment might in fact consist of parts from various times assembled together. A detail that deserves particular attention is a movable wing that is located in the lower part of the revetment of Christ and offers a similar function to the wings of some Cypriot composite icons—it is at the same time a concealing and revelatory device, offering not only concealment, but also opening and display. The abovementioned revetments raise a question similar to those asked about the wings of composite icons as to when such openings were used and who controlled this act. Adding larger panels, especially with wings, creates not only a sense of uniqueness and authenticity for the object captured within, but also enhances the desire to see or touch it. Paying attention to this detail can help us to understand the possible underlying dynamics of interaction between the faithful and such icons. The interplay between the visible and the invisible could have activated the faithful's imagination and allowed them to form special bonds with the hidden object. The potential of closure and opening stimulates reaction—be it desire, curiosity, or maybe even surprise. It raises hypothetical questions on the potential use of composite icons and whether the form was particularly popular on Cyprus because it seems that at least the examples with wings might have been a local tradition partly inspired by the form of the local cult of the hidden-from-view Kykkotissa icon. This potential link might have explained the prevalence of icons depicting the Virgin Mary with Christ among Cypriot composite icons, but any further connection between the Kykkotissa icon and the composite icons, although possible, remains hypothetical.

46 For a photograph of the revetment when it was still attached to the icon, see Papageorgiou, *Icons of Cyprus*, 31, fig. 17.

47 Nikolaos Gkioles dates the metal revetment to the twelfth century, but notes that the plaques with saints were later, most likely from the fourteenth century, proposing that they were added then; see Gkioles, *Η χριστιανική τέχνη*, 129. The later dating has also been proposed by Charalampos Chotzakoglou; see C. G. Chotzakoglou, “Βυζαντινή αρχιτεκτονική και τέχνη στην Κύπρο,” in *Ιστορία της Κύπρου*, vol. 3, *Βυζαντινή Κύπρος*, ed. T. Papadopoulos (Nicosia, 2005), 743, n. 2072, fig. 784. According to Durand, the revetment of the icon was certainly created after the middle of the fourteenth century due to the use of the *basse-taille* enameling technique; see Durand, “Chypre et les arts somptuaires byzantins,” 152, n. 15.

A Broader Phenomenon?

Apparently, there are also Cypriot icons that could have been once part of composite icons or could have been inspired by their form. Therefore, in order to extend the discussion on composite icons and present a broader picture of this phenomenon in Cyprus, it is worth mentioning icons not entirely adhering to Vocotopoulos's definition, such as the fascinating icon of the Virgin from the Church of Panagia in Malounta, now held at the Byzantine Museum of the Archbishop Makarios III Foundation in Nicosia (no. 229) (Fig. 16). Even though the panel construction is visible in the



Fig. 16. Icon of the Virgin Mary from the Church of Panagia in Malounta. No. 229, Byzantine Museum of the Archbishop Makarios III Foundation, Nicosia. Photograph courtesy of the Byzantine Museum of the Archbishop Makarios III Foundation.

Fig. 17.
Icon of the Virgin and
Child. Church of the
Holy Cross, Pano
Lefkara. Photograph
by Ropertos
Georgiou, APAC Labs
/ STARC; courtesy of
The Cyprus Institute,
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Holy Metropolis of
Trimythous.



lower part of the icon, where paint losses have revealed two separate panels inserted one into another, this fact was not meant to be visible, given both panels were covered by a single painted layer. The fact alone of older icon reuse is not enough to meet Vocotopoulos's definition, so this example would not be called a composite icon with two separate images, though it is still an instance of enlarging a fourteenth-century icon in the sixteenth century by adding a second piece of wood.⁴⁸ We can only wonder whether the new piece of wood

replaced a destroyed part, or rather was aimed at creating an additional place for the figure painted in the lower corner. The gesture of adding a new piece of wood is similar to composite icons, as is the overlapping of the time frame, since most Cypriot examples come from the sixteenth century; and yet there is no clear attempt to distinguish the two panels, which plays a crucial role in composite icons. Therefore, it remains an open question as to whether this example was inspired by icons of this form, consisting of clearly distinguished embedding and embedded panels. There are, however, other icons where such inspiration might have played a prominent role, such as an icon of the Virgin and Child from the Church of the Holy Cross in Pano Lefkara (Fig. 17) that was extensively repainted in 1757 by Philaretos, as mentioned in the inscription in the upper

48 For more information on the icon, see A. Papageorgiou, "The Virgin Orans," in *Byzantine Medieval Cyprus*, ed. D. Papanikola-Bakirtzis and M. Iacovou (Nicosia, 1998), 122, no. 55; and I. A. Eliades, ed., *Παλαιολόγεις αντανakλάσεις στην τέχνη της Κύπρου (1261–1489) / Palaeologan Reflections in the Art of Cyprus (1261–1489)* (Nicosia, 2019), 103, no. 10.



Fig. 18.
Panagia Saitiotissa.
Monastery of Saint John
the Baptist, Mesa
Potamos. Photograph by
Ropertos Georgiou,
APAC Labs / STARC;
courtesy of The Cyprus
Institute, reproduced by
permission of the Holy
Metropolis of Limassol.

left-hand side of the icon, above the Virgin's shoulder.⁴⁹ The very fact that it consists of two separate and visually distinguished panels makes it possible that this specific icon was inspired by the form of composite icons, even though this example would be excluded from this category as understood by Vocotopoulos, due to the lack of any figural decoration on the embedded piece of

wood. The partly damaged painting layer depicts only fragments of a cross with IC XC, most likely followed originally by NIKA. It remains unknown why this specific piece of wood was considered worth emphasizing by inserting it into a larger panel, but this act might have served a similar role to creating composite icons—creating an impression of a special status of the inset.

Another icon whose form was possibly inspired by composite icons is a sixteenth-century icon known as Panagia Saitiotissa, now kept in the recently reopened Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Mesa Potamos (Fig. 18).⁵⁰ The inset is sometimes presented as a separate

49 For the inscription and more information on the icon, see T. Kalle, "Μήτηρ Θεού η Ελεούσα—Mother of God Eleousa," in Bakirtzis, *Θρησκευτικές εικόνες της Κύπρου / Religious Icons of Cyprus*, 1209–10, no. 127:62, where the icon is dated to the seventeenth century. Cf. information provided by Anthi Andronikou in the collection of photographs *Ιερός Ναός Τιμίου Σταυρού Λευκάρων: Εκλογή Εικόνων / Church of the Holy Cross, Lefkara: A Selection of Icons* (Lefkara, 2020), fig. 5, where the original painting layer of the icon is dated to the late sixteenth century and attributed to Loukas Tochnites.

50 Sophocleous, *Icons de Chypre*, 194, no. 97; and A. Papa-georgiou, "Μήτηρ Θεού η Οδηγήτρια—Mother of God Hodegetria,"



Fig. 19. Icon from the Monastery of Panagia Avgasida in Milia (lost). Photograph courtesy of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus, reproduced by permission granted by the director of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus.

and much older panel,⁵¹ and it is indeed difficult to establish precisely the internal structure without technical analysis such as X-ray radiography, but a crack on the round depiction in the center is clearly visible on the back of the embedding icon. This suggests that we may be in fact dealing with a single panel with a carved and thoroughly painted circular cavity and not the actual insertion of a separate piece of wood. If so, it is possible that this used to be a composite icon, but the inset was

lost and recreated as a painting in the remaining empty space of an unusual round shape.⁵² Another possibility is that this form aims to imitate composite icons and create the impression that the central image is a separate and supposedly older panel, which was perhaps applied in order to raise the status of the icon and, thus, the status of its owner. Another question, yet without a definite answer, is the issue of the original presentation of Panagia Saitiotissa. When the monastery at Mesa Potamos was closed in the early twentieth century, the Panagia Saitiotissa icon was kept for some time at the Church of the Holy Cross in Kouka.⁵³ In its new location, the icon was briefly described by Rupert Gunnis, who mentions “a bronze medallion of the Virgin and Child in the centre,”⁵⁴ so it is possible that the inset was originally hidden behind a metal cover, now sadly lost. This idea of hiding the central representation and thus authenticating its special status resonates well with the already discussed examples with movable wings in which such a concealment creates not so much protection but, rather, adornment and serves (so it appears) to authenticate the special status of the hidden object.

There are also cases of panels that most likely were once parts of composite icons, as suggested by the characteristic rectangular cavities in their centers. One such example is an icon from the Monastery of Panagia Avgasida in Milia—now lost, but which has been preserved in archival photographs (Fig. 19). Athanasios Papageorgiou has dated it to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century and proposed that the then empty cavity most likely had earlier contained a smaller panel of the Virgin Mary.⁵⁵ Another example with a similar rectangular, yet empty, cavity is an icon from the

in Bakirtzis, *Θρησκευτικές Εικόνες της Κύπρου / Religious Icons of Cyprus*, 401, no. E19a:1 (where it is described as an icon from Kouka).

51 *Ιερά Μονή Τιμίου Προδρόμου Μέσα Ποταμού: Ένα οδοιπορικό στον χρόνο* (Limassol, 2017), 350; and Kakkoura, *The Living Presence of the Theotokos*, 38, fig. 18.

52 I know of no composite icon with an embedded icon of a round shape. It resonates, though, with associations to the painting by Sandro Botticelli with an inserted roundel; see Zaprzalska, “Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Composite Icons Reconsidered” (forthcoming). It can be noted that round icons are known from Venetian-ruled Crete—such an icon was mentioned by the painter Angelos in his will from 1436; see M. Manousakas, “Η διαθήκη του Αγγέλου Ακοτάντου (1436), αγνώστου κρητικού ζωγράφου,” *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Έπ.* 2 (1960–1961): 139–51, at 148; and M. Vassilaki, *The Painter Angelos and Icon-Painting in Venetian Crete* (Farnham, 2009), 13–14.

53 On the recent history of the icon, see *Ιερά Μονή Τιμίου Προδρόμου Μέσα Ποταμού*, 42.

54 Gunnis, *Historic Cyprus*, 284.

55 A. Papageorgiou, *Christian Art in the Turkish-Occupied Part of Cyprus* (Nicosia, 2010), 269–70.



Fig. 20.
Icon of the Virgin and Child
from the monastery of Agios
Georgios Koumanon in
Mesana. No. 61, Byzantine
Museum of the Holy
Metropolis of Paphos, Paphos.
Photograph by Ropertos
Georgiou, APAC Labs /
STARC; courtesy of The
Cyprus Institute, reproduced
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Metropolis of Paphos.

second half of the sixteenth century bearing the depiction of the Virgin Mary and Child with the inscription M(HTH)P Θ(EO)Υ ΠΑΝΤΑΝΑCΑ that is held at the Byzantine Museum of the Holy Metropolis of Paphos (Fig. 20) and originally comes from the monastery of Saint George Komanon (or Koumanon) near Mesana.⁵⁶ Immediately above the hand of the Virgin is a rectangular cavity that most likely used to house

a smaller icon.⁵⁷ What is interesting, though, is the irregularity in the composition—the cavity, instead of being in the center, is slightly moved toward the left-hand side. One possible explanation is that it was cut in an icon that had been painted earlier, and the craftsman moved the cutting in order to avoid cutting

56 Archimandrite Tychikos, *Ιερά Μονή Αγίου Γεωργίου Κουμάνων* (Nicosia, 2018), 6, 67, 69. For more information about this place, see A. Papageorgiou, “Γεωργίου Αγίου των Κουμάνων εκκλησία, Μέσανα,” in *Μεγάλη Κυπριακή Εγκυκλοπαίδεια*, vol. 4, ed. A. Paulides (Nicosia, 1984), 52.

57 For other icons with such cavities that could house smaller icons, see, for example, the already mentioned two Georgian triptychs from the monastery of Ubisi (see above, n. 38) or the bilateral icon with the Feasts scenes and Christ Pantokrator at the National Museum of History in Sofia, Bulgaria (no. 29049): R. Ruseva, “Obrazi na paskhlnata radost: Dvustranana ikona s praznichni sčeni ot XIV vek ot Načionalnīā istoricheski muzei v Sofīā,” *Monumenta* 4 (2019): 261–76.

Fig. 21.
Icon of Saint George from the
monastery of Agios Georgios
Koumanon in Mesana.
Monastery of Panagia Chrysor-
rogiatissa. Photograph by
Ropertos Georgiou, APAC
Labs / STARC; courtesy of The
Cyprus Institute, reproduced
by permission of the Holy
Metropolis of Paphos.



off the blessing hand of Christ. If so, then it would be an instance of inserting a smaller icon into a reused panel and not an icon created specifically for the purpose of embedding. It cannot be determined what the central image depicted, but most likely it was another icon of the Virgin and Child, due to the dominance of this type in other composite icons. Interestingly, the monastery of Agios Georgios Koumanon once housed one more icon that apparently served in the past as an embedding icon for a smaller inset—an icon of Saint George that is now kept in the monastery of Panagia Chrysorrogiatissa (Fig. 21). An opening in the center used to contain a smaller icon of Saint George that was

most likely hidden from view, since one wing installed at its height still remains.⁵⁸

In some rare cases, the now lost parts of such icons are recorded in old descriptions or archival photographs. An icon from the Church of Panagia in Lageia

58 According to the words of the hegumen of the monastery of Panagia Chrysorrogiatissa, Archimandrite Dionysios, the small icon of Saint George that used to be there was given to the monastery of Saint Spyridon in Tremetousia for restoration before the year 1974 and subsequently lost; see Archimandrite Tychikos, *Ιερά Μονή Αγίου Γεωργίου Κουμάνων*, 63–64. I am indebted to Christodoulos Hadjichristodoulou for bringing this icon and its history to my attention.



Fig. 22.
Icon of the Virgin and Child.
Church of Panagia, Lageia.
Photograph by Ropertos
Georgiou, APAC Labs /
STARC; courtesy of The
Cyprus Institute, reproduced
by permission of the Holy
Metropolis of Trimythous.

(Fig. 22), dated to the second half of the sixteenth century, depicts the Virgin and Child, and the central representation is surrounded by a frame with a floral decoration forming the Tree of Jesse.⁵⁹ A small cavity measuring 13.5 × 8.5 cm in the lower left-hand corner now remains empty, but its content is mentioned by Gunnis in his description of the church from

59 The exact iconographic layout is difficult to establish due to extensive damage to the figures and the scrolls, but it seems that the two best-preserved figures next to the prostrate figure of Jesse are those of Jacob and Moses in poses bearing striking similarity to the depictions on the already mentioned icon from Larnaka. For more on this iconographic type, see above, n. 9.

the beginning of the twentieth century as “an early sixteenth-century palimpsest icon of the B.V.M., in a poor state of preservation, the frame decorated with paintings of various saints and martyrs. In the right-hand corner of the icon is a small hinged door, which once covered a relic, on the reverse of the icon is a painting of St. John the Divine.”⁶⁰ The icon was recorded in a black-and-white photograph published by David Talbot Rice in 1937, and the inset is still visible, despite the small size of the illustration.⁶¹ Rice mentions that

60 Gunnis, *Historic Cyprus*, 319.

61 D. T. Rice, *The Icons of Cyprus* (London, 1937), pl. XXIV, no. 52.

“a small compartment with [a] door, to provide housing for a reliquary, is cut into the panel near the bottom, on the Virgin’s right. The pattern of the Virgin’s costume is continued over its outer face; its inner face, shown in the reproduction, bears the half-length figure of St. John.”⁶² Both descriptions clearly mention that the cavity covered by a now lost wing contained a relic, not an icon, but from them it can be concluded that the depiction of the saint was in fact on the back of the small panel in the form of doors and the obverse was integral with the maphorion of the Virgin—which is not entirely clear from Rice’s photograph showing the side with the saint. Although previously identified as Saint John, another, and probably more likely, candidate is Saint Luke, owing to the short hair and beard. This supposition could be further confirmed by the analogies of the abovementioned Panagia Titiotissa with its one-winged door of a very similar form; here, the obverse is integral with the maphorion of the Virgin with an elaborate flowered pattern highlighted in gold, while the reverse depicts Saint Luke accompanied by an inscription identifying the saint. His iconography in Kalavassos is indeed similar to the portrayal of the saint from the archival photograph of the Lageia icon, so it can be suggested with a high degree of probability that the Lageia icon used to have a similar arrangement with a movable wing with the depiction of Saint Luke. If so, the already discussed gesture of hiding and revealing played a prominent role, which again raises the question regarding the possible relation between the form of Cypriot composite icons and the Kykkotissa icon that, as mentioned above, has been traditionally hidden from view and was once provided with a metal cover with a movable wing. The inclusion of this particular saint is perhaps not coincidental, since Saint Luke was believed to portray the Virgin Mary and Christ. Among the icons attributed to Saint Luke was the Virgin of Kykkos,⁶³ but also other Cypriot Marian icons, since “the frequent attribution of sacred icons to St Luke constituted a devotional *topos*, strengthening the inner cohesion of local communities; as miracle-working

objects, they protected their believers from a hostile world, whilst their very ancientness itself asserted their possessors’ uninterrupted observance of the traditions inherited from their Byzantine past.”⁶⁴ The Lageia icon, as well as the material presented above, indicates that the composite form was particularly popular on Cyprus. Additionally, the fact that it is possible to find icons that once most likely contained embedded icons, archival photographs of now lost icons of this form, or icons that could have been in fact inspired by composite icons, suggests that their number could have been even larger than the material that has been preserved.



Chronologically and geographically distant composite icons can be seen as part of a broader phenomenon of reusing icons by insertion, but this paper offers a slightly different approach and focuses instead on composite icons from one territory. The significant number of Cypriot icons meeting Vocotopoulos’s definition of a composite icon, as well as the existence of icons imitating this form, or being inspired by it, suggests that the form was widely known on Cyprus from at least the sixteenth century onward. This paper is the first attempt to gather such Cypriot icons within a single study. It is probable that future studies will expand this group, for such icons are still employed and venerated in churches and remain unknown to the wider academic community.⁶⁵

64 M. Bacci, “With the Paintbrush of the Evangelist Luke,” in *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. M. Vassilaki (Milan, 2000), 79–90, at 88. See also fig. 44, which shows a fragmented icon of the Virgin Mary and Child kept in the iconostasis of the Church of Panagia Chrysaliniotissa in Nicosia, consisting of a thirteenth-century panel and parts of an eighteenth-century panel with the image of St. Luke. The accompanying inscription attributes the embedded icon to him and states that the addition of a new panel was caused by the poor state of preservation of the original panel. For more on the icon and the inscription, see A. Papageorgiou, “Μια ανέκδοτη διήγηση για τις εικόνες που ζωγράφισε, κατά την παράδοση, ο Απόστολος Λουκάς και την ίδρυση της Μονής Κύκκου,” *Επετηρίδα Κέντρου Μελετών Ιεράς Μονής Κύκκου* 6 (2004): 9–56, at 49, figs. 1–4.

65 Moreover, some of the abovementioned icons have been extensively repainted, which could be an indication of heavy use and veneration. Possible future studies including technical analysis of Cypriot composite icons will, hopefully, shed light not only on later interventions but also on the exact materials, techniques, and technologies used in their creation and deepen our understanding of this phenomenon.

62 Rice, *The Icons of Cyprus*, 223, no. 52.

63 Bacci, *Il pennello dell’Evangelista*, 208–12. The oldest surviving reference to the Lukan authorship appears to be the mention in the copy of the Chronicle of Leontios Machairas of 1555 in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Selden Supra 14, fol. 12v; see M. Pieres and A. Nikolaou-Konnare, eds., *Λεόντιου Μαχαιρά Χρονικό της Κύπρου: Παράλληλη διπλωματική έκδοση των χειρογράφων* (Nicosia, 2003), 87.

Treating each example as a case study with close attention paid to their various material forms demonstrates that some Cypriot composite icons have features that are uncommon to other territories. In most Cypriot examples, we can note a visible repetition of the iconography—both the embedding and the embedded panels usually depict the Virgin Mary with Christ. Examples where wings allow for concealment are even more complex because, to some extent, the exterior reveals the interior and offers representative information on what is enclosed within, even when the wings are closed.⁶⁶ The embedded icon was perhaps intended to be concealed and in a way “accessible” at the same time—it is known, yet made invisible, so it creates the paradox of being visible and invisible at the same time. This nested arrangement creates a potential revelation of something concealed and provokes the desire for opening. The large panel becomes a real and symbolic intermediary space between the inset and the faithful that orchestrates the pious viewer’s experience of the embedded icon. Cypriot examples illustrate that, apart from its prominent presentation, the embedding icon also offers ease in the transportation of the embedded icon, and sometimes even its concealment and therefore control over who can access the object inside, and when. The larger panel provides protection, but mostly it emphasizes the smaller icon, authenticating or even creating its special status, and this relation is closer to the one between a relic and a reliquary, particularly nested reliquaries with relics enclosed in elaborated forms giving the power over the devotee’s privilege of access.⁶⁷ As

66 This brings to mind the veil of the icon of the “Usual Miracle” at the Blachernai that, according to Maria Parani, most likely bore a gold-embroidered or woven image of the Virgin: “the veil, though physically hiding the icon, would have ensured that the faithful were granted some form of indirect visual access to the panel, even when the veil remained down” (Parani, “Experiencing Miraculous Icons in Byzantium,” 180).

67 For more on nesting reliquaries and the rhetoric of enshrinement in reliquaries, see, for example, H. L. Kessler, “*Arca Arcarum*: Nested Boxes and the Dynamics of Sacred Experience,” *Codex Aquilarensis* 30 (2014): 83–107; H. A. Klein, “Materiality and the Sacred: Byzantine Reliquaries and the Rhetoric of Enshrinement,” in *Saints and Sacred Matter: The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond*, ed. C. Hahn and H. A. Klein (Washington, DC, 2015), 231–52; and C. Hahn, *The Reliquary Effect: Enshrining the Sacred Object* (London, 2017), 69–71, 77–78. For further reflections on the concealment of the sacred, particularly in relation to the presentation

noted by Cynthia Hahn, “First, the reliquary encloses. By doing so, it makes a first move of establishing the place of the sacred in space,” and “acts of selection and enframement *make* the relic rather than the reverse.”⁶⁸ This comparison to relics and reliquaries is even more intriguing in the case of these composite icons whose form allows the inset to be taken out, as, for example, in the Agridia icon. When the inset can be removed, another modality of access is offered. In the case of Agridia, not only does the embedding icon create a self-contained image, but once the embedded icon is taken out, it loses its function of being a container, and the two panels can exist and perform separately, or together, each time offering the viewer different experiences. We have to reconsider the relation between the two panels that clearly goes far beyond the relation between a frame and a framed object, and sometimes even that between a container and a contained object. Both surfaces—the embedded and the embedding one—legitimize each other. The embedded icon acts as a catalyzer of the viewer’s experience and lends its authority to the embedding icon, but it is at the same time the embedding icon that creates a feeling that the inset is unique and authenticates its special status. The act of reuse by inseting enhances the desire and elevates the value of the object captured within. The Cypriot examples confirm that the act of nesting an icon into another appears to be far from merely restoration, at least far from our current understanding of this act. As noted by Ivan Drpić, “The practice of restoring icons in the premodern world was not envisioned as a way to stop or constrain change. Its goal was not to stabilize the image. Rather, this practice affirmed the image as a continuum, an entity that, on account of its material constitution, undergoes perpetual change.”⁶⁹ It seems that such activities were driven not only by care for the material side of the icon, but the issue that played an equally, if not more, prominent role was the desire to draw attention

and identification of the relics, see A. Palladino, *Inventing Late Antique Reliquaries: Reception, Material History, and Dynamics of Interaction (4th–6th Centuries CE)* (Rome, 2022), 106–16 (with additional bibliography).

68 Hahn, *The Reliquary Effect*, 12, 21.

69 I. Drpić, “Neourgia: The Restoration of Icons in the Premodern World,” in *The Icon: A History, from Late Antiquity to the Present*, ed. C. Barber and M. Vassilaki (Cambridge, forthcoming). I am grateful to the author for sharing this text with me before its publication.

to the embedded element. The status and meaning of the smaller icon is significantly enhanced by adding a larger panel, but at the same time, the act of insertion transforms the embedding icon itself and grants it the ambiguous role that is similar to, and yet far from, the one of frames, reliquaries, or containers.

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Appendix

| No. | Name | Place | Dimensions |
|-----|---|--|---|
| 1. | Icon of Saint Paraskeve | Church of the Prophet Elijah, Agridia | 94 × 68–70.5 × 4 cm; inset icon: 12 × 9.5 × 1 cm |
| 2. | Icon of the Virgin and Child (known as Panagia Amirou) | Monastery of Panagia Amirou, near Apsiou | 89 × 60 × 4 cm; inset icon: 30 × 21 × 1 cm |
| 3. | Icon of the Virgin and Child (known as Panagia Titiotissa) | Church of Panagia, Kalavassos | 92 × 60 × 4 cm; inset icon: 10 × 8 cm |
| 4. | Icon of the Virgin Mary with prophets and hymnographers | Church of Panagia Chrysopolitissa, Larnaka | 78.5 × 60 × 4 cm; inset icon: 27 × 21 cm |
| 5. | Icon of the Virgin and Child (known as Panagia Agria) | Monastery of Panagia Agria (original location of the icon, now at the Church of Saint George in Mylikouri) | 93 × 66 × 3.5 cm; current inset icon replacing the original one and attached from the back: 27 × 19 cm; size of the original opening: 8 × 6.5 cm |
| 6. | Icon of the Virgin and Child (known as Panagia Valeriotissa) | Church of Saint Nicholas, Palodeia | 109.5 × 67 × 4 cm; inset icon: 23.5 × 16.5 cm |
| 7. | Icon of Saint John the Baptist | Church of the Holy Cross, Pano Lefkara | 115 × 68 × 3 cm; inset icon: 83 × 41 cm |
| 8. | Icon of the Virgin and Child | Church of Panagia Chryseleousa, Praitori | 103 × 69 × 3 cm; inset icon: 14 × 13 cm |
| 9. | Icon of the Virgin and Child | Church of Panagia, Lageia | 87 × 64 × 2.5–6 cm |
| 10. | Icon of the Virgin and Child (known as Panagia Saitiotissa) | Monastery of Saint John the Baptist, Mesa Potamos | 119 × 85 × 2.5–3.5 cm |
| 11. | Icon of Saint George | Monastery of Saint George Komanon (or Koumanon), near Mesana (original location of the icon, now in the monastery of Panagia Chrysorrogiatissa) | 104 × 75 × 4 cm |
| 12. | Icon of the Virgin and Child | Monastery of Saint George Komanon (or Koumanon), near Mesana (original location of the icon, now at the Byzantine Museum of the Holy Metropolis of Paphos) | 113 × 80.5 × 3.5 cm |
| 13. | Icon of the Virgin and Child | Church of the Holy Cross, Pano Lefkara | 81–86 × 65 × 3 cm |
| 14. | Fragment of an embedding icon | Monastery of Panagia Avgasida, Milia (now lost) | Unknown |



